ISRA
IMPORTANT SHARK AND RAY AREAS

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

WEYMOUTH ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Weymouth is located on the southern coast of England, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This area is a sheltered bay characterised by sandy and rocky beaches. It is influenced by the English Channel and the mouth of the River Wey. Within this area there are: **reproductive areas** (Small-eyed Skate *Raja microocellata*).

CRITERIA

Sub-criterion C1 – Reproductive Areas

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

0–10 metres

3.64 km²

DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Weymouth is located on the southern coast of England, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The area includes Preston Beach and Bowleaze Cove. It is a sheltered bay characterised by sandy and rocky beaches (Heeps 1986) and influenced by the English Channel and the mouth of the River Wey.

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and is delineated from surface and inshore waters (0 m) to 10 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

SUB-CRITERION C1 – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

Weymouth is an important reproductive area for one ray species.

Between 2023–2025, 29 Small-eyed Skates were observed in this area through underwater visual census conducted across nine days between May–September (SEA LIFE unpubl data. 2025). All observed individuals were neonate/young-of-the-year (YOY) measuring between 10–30 cm disc width (DW). This equates to a maximum of ~40 cm total length (TL) using a species-specific DW to TL conversion (McCully et al. 2012). The size-at-birth of this species is 10–13 cm TL (Last et al. 2016). The smallest size-at-maturity of the species ranges from 66–73 cm TL in this part of the region (IFCA 2021). Some Small-eyed Skates were caught and measured to determine a reference point to estimate the size of other individuals. Neonate/YOY Small-eyed Skates were observed in 2023 (n = 10 in 3 days), 2024 (n = 16 in 2 days), and 2025 (n = 3 in 4 days) (SEA LIFE unpubl. data 2025). The observations are typically made between Preston Beach and Bowleaze Cove. As surveys were only undertaken between May–September, additional temporal data are required to confirm the seasonality of the importance of this area. Additional observations of small individuals recorded through recreational activities (e.g., angling and snorkelling) have been shared online. Small-eyed Skates are relatively rare in Northwest Europe (IFCA 2021). Little is known about the reproduction of the species, however, egg laying behaviour peaks in the season that these observations were made (Ellis & Walls 2015). Further, this area is characterised by suitable habitat (sandy bays) and the observation of neonate/YOY Small-eyed Skates here is consistent with the known habitat preferences of the species during early life stages, particularly shallow sandy banks close to the shore (Stehmann & Bürkel 1984; Kaiser et al. 2004; Ellis et al. 2005). Weymouth is one of only two locations within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with regular and predictable observations of the species at this life stage.

Acknowledgments

Samantha Hook (SEA LIFE), Chris Brown (SEA LIFE), and Ryan Charles (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group – ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2025 ISRA Region 02 – European Atlantic workshop for their contributions to this process.

This factsheet has undergone review by the ISRA Independent Review Panel prior to its publication.

This project was funded by the Shark Conservation Fund, a philanthropic collaborative pooling expertise and resources to meet the threats facing the world's sharks and rays. The Shark Conservation Fund is a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

Suggested citation

IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. 2025. Weymouth ISRA Factsheet. Dubai: IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group.

QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met								
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2
RAYS												
Raja microocellata	Small-eyed Skate	NT	0–100			X						

REFERENCES

Ellis JR, Walls RHL. 2015. *Raja microocellata* (Europe assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2015: e.T39400A48943658.

Ellis JR, Dulvy NK, Jennings S, Parker-Humphreys M, Rogers SI. 2005. Assessing the status of demersal elasmobranchs in UK waters: A review. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom* 85: 1025–1047. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025315405012099

Heeps C. 1986. Sediment circulation in mixed gravel and shingle bayhead beaches on the South East Dorset coast. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Dorset Institute of Higher Education, Dorset.

Kaiser MJ, Bergmann M, Hinz H, Galanidi M, Shucksmith R, Rees EIS, Darbyshire T, Ramsay K. 2004. Demersal fish and epifauna associated with sandbank habitats. *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science* 60: 445–456. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecss.2004.02.005

Last PR, White WT, de Carvalho MR, Séret B, Stehmann MFW, Naylor GJP. 2016. *Rays of the world.* Clayton South: CSIRO Publishing.

McCully SR, Scott F, Ellis JR. 2012. Lengths at maturity and conversion factors for skates (Rajidae) around the British Isles, with an analysis of data in the literature. *ICES Journal of Marine Science* 69: 1812–1822. https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fss150

Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA). 2021. Small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata*). Available at: https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/25364/sitedata/Redesign/Key_Species/Small-eyed-ray-Species-Profile.pdf Accessed July 2025.

Stehmann M, Bürkel DL. 1984. Rajidae. In: Whitehead PJP, Bauchot ML, Hureau JC, Tortonese E, eds. *Fishes of the northeastern Atlantic and Mediterranean*. Paris: UNESCO, 163–196